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NSC FOR ABRAMS/YERGER/MCDERMOTT
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 DRUZE MP REMINDS DAS HALE THAT
HIZBALLAH HAS NO INTENTION OF GIVING UP ITS ARMS

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) March 14 MP Marwan Hamadeh expressed concerns about ongoing affronts to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Israeli actions benefiting Hizballah and Syria during his August 29 meeting with visiting NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary David Hale. Hamadeh predicted Hizballah would either delay the 2009 parliamentary elections or challenge the results if Hizballah's arms were threatened. According to Hamadeh, the August 28 attack on a LAF helicopter occurred in an area of south Lebanon that is of great strategic importance to Hizballah. Meanwhile, the ongoing violence in Tripoli in the north was creating a military vacuum in south Lebanon as LAF troops were redeployed to the north to deal with it. Hamadeh also stressed the need for the international community to send strong signals that the Special Tribunal for Lebanon was moving forward and that justice would eventually prevail. End summary.

"WILL GUN POWER CHANGE
THE ARMY'S WILLPOWER?"

¶2. (C) NEA Deputy Assistant Secretary David Hale, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief and Senior LES Political Advisor, met with Progressive Socialist Party MP Marwan Hamadeh, independent MP Ghassan Tueini (owner and publisher of An-Nahar newspaper and member of the 2006 National Dialogue), and Rosana Abou Monsif (An-Nahar editorialist) at An-Nahar headquarters in downtown Beirut on August 29, shortly before the cabinet appointed General Jean Kahwagi as the next commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF).

¶3. (C) Hamadeh warned that the LAF was in a dreadful situation. Citing the LAF's inaction during the one and a half years of Hizballah's occupation of downtown Beirut, its killing of civilians during clashes in Beirut early in the year, its failures to prevent arms smuggling to the south, to control security outside the Palestinian camps, and to confront Hizballah in May, and, most recently, its ineffectiveness in stopping the violence in Tripoli, Hamadeh warned that the debate over the choice of LAF Commander was the latest in a long list of events debilitating the Lebanese

army. Alluding to U.S. military assistance for the LAF, Hamadeh wondered aloud, "Will gun power change the army's willpower?"

14. (C) DAS Hale replied that the U.S. remained focused on and committed to Lebanon, and that U.S. military assistance to the LAF was important not only because of the needs of the military, but also as a symbol of tangible U.S. support for Lebanon and its institutions. The biggest challenge for Lebanon was the continuing flow of arms to Hizballah, Hale said, noting that reducing the flows would also help in resolving Sheba'a Farms. UNSC Resolution 1701 must be implemented, he stressed.

15. (C) Despite the recent turmoil, DAS Hale continued, the Lebanese people were resilient and wanted independence. Everyone seemed to want the Doha Accord to stick, he added, and it needed to be implemented. Hale also stressed that Christian unity was essential; throughout Lebanon's history, Christian unity was good not only for the Christians but for the country as a whole, and it was in their collective interest to win the 2009 parliamentary elections, which would determine the future of Lebanon. The U.S. was trying to help, Hale stressed, but needed to be careful not to do or say anything that might backfire against the March 14 majority.

16. (C) Hamadeh agreed that the U.S. needed to be careful in supporting March 14, but warned that when the U.S. is too quiet, its allies lose confidence while the enemies of the U.S. perceive it as abandoning its friends whenever the

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situation gets difficult or it no longer serves U.S. interests. He predicted Hizballah would either prevent the 2009 parliamentary elections from occurring, or would challenge the results. Hizballah's tactic now, he said, is to delay the National Dialogue, possibly until the elections. There will be no early or peaceful solution to the question of Hizballah's arms, he stated.

ISRAEL BOOSTING
HIZBALLAH AND SYRIA

17. (C) Hamadeh and Abou Mansif complained that Israel's policies toward Syria and Hizballah were boosting their influence within Lebanon. They viewed the recent violence in Tripoli and August 28 attack on a Lebanese Armed Forces helicopter in south Lebanon as attempts to undermine the LAF and create a power vacuum in the south.

18. (C) Lebanon had always suspected Israel of propping up the Asad regime, Hamadeh said, commenting that notwithstanding Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, the Israeli-Syria relationship was the most stable. Tueini, a fellow student of Henry Kissinger at Harvard, pointed to Kissinger's memoirs, in which he claimed Hafez Asad had consulted the Israelis on how far he could go before invading Israel.

19. (C) Tueini complained that French President Sarkozy was not helping either by assisting Bashar Asad build up a new image. Hale responded that the U.S. position remained that Syria must change its behavior and he enumerated the range of objectionable policies; otherwise, Asad would continue his practice of appearing to be forthcoming but in reality giving nothing of significance.

110. (C) Hamadeh stressed the need for signals from the international community that things are moving forward with the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which he called one of the last products of the Cedar Revolution. He agreed with DAS Hale that the process should not be politicized, arguing instead that the focus should be on justice. We need to know that justice will prevail, even if late, he said.

¶11. (C) The Lebanese also were at a loss to understand Israel's continuing concessions to Hizballah, Hamadeh said, which only boosted its credibility. Tueini agreed, adding that the recent prisoner exchange was a "big bonus" for Hizballah. Hamadeh, dubbing UNIFIL a "bunch of tourists" south of the Litani River, acknowledged the symbolic and psychological importance of maintaining a buffer zone between Hizballah and Israel, but said UNIFIL was doing nothing effectively on the ground. How is it possible, he said, that in two years UNIFIL has not produced a single rifle?

¶12. (C) Hamadeh noted that the August 28 attack against a LAF helicopter occurred in an area of immense strategic importance for Hizballah, at the crossroads of the Bekaa, south Lebanon, and Chouf Mountains, from which Hizballah could easily invade the south. By fixating the LAF's attention on Tripoli, Hamadeh said Syria was creating an abyss in the south by forcing troops to redeploy to the north. He noted that General Jean Kahwagi (whom the cabinet named as LAF Commander shortly after the meeting) and General Chikhani (the commander of the 10th brigade in the south) had both been transferred to the north, leaving a vacuum of experienced LAF leadership in the south.

¶13. (C) DAS Hale has cleared this cable.
SISON